

REMARKS BY

AMBASSADOR KENNETH M. QUINN
PRESIDENT, WORLD FOOD PRIZE FOUNDATION

AT THE

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(REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY)

Governor Branstad, with my wife Le Son and our children Davin, Shandon and Kelly, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for providing one of the most memorable days our family has had or I have ever had in my entire professional life.

Governor, as I told you and Lieutenant Governor Reynolds when you first informed me about this high honor, I was struggling for the words to adequately convey my feelings and the depths of my gratitude to you for this incredible recognition. And as you can see, I am still stumbling today to find the right words.

I am so deeply appreciative of the professional relationship we have had back from the time when you were Lieutenant Governor through our current efforts to have the World Food Prize – this great public-private partnership – promote economic development for our state and provide extraordinary educational opportunities for young Iowans.

Lieutenant Governor Reynolds, I want to extend my gratitude to you as well for your extremely generous comments and for all that we have been able to do together to promote STEM education for Iowa high school students, especially through our Iowa Youth Institute.

Governor Ray, having been nominated for this award by you, yourself an Iowa Award recipient, is so deeply meaningful to me. Given all that we did together on behalf of refugees, I am so very pleased that you could be here today. I would not have had the opportunity to have returned to Iowa except for that conversation in 1976 when I represented the White House at a refugee celebration and you told me that you could use a guy like me back here in Iowa.

When Bill Knapp and Simon Estes, two other Iowa Award winners, and I were interviewed on Iowa Press a week ago, the host, Dean Borg, asked us whom we admired most among Iowans. I replied that

throughout my diplomatic career, I have been privileged to be able to observe and to know many significant leaders including presidents, secretaries of state and foreign leaders around the world. But the two most inspiring figures I have ever known or been associated with Norman Borlaug and Bob Ray.

John and Janis Ruan, thank you for the incredible friendship you have extended to me and the entire Quinn family. John, I'm so very grateful to you for your role in this nomination process as well as for the partnership that we have had over the past 15 years and building The World Food Prize upon the legacy that your Dad and Norm, both Iowa Award recipients, put in place. Thank you for your vision that this building could become the magnificent treasure that it is, and for giving me one of the best retirement gigs in history, by letting me lead the effort to restore it.

Ambassador Chuck Larson and Senator Matt McCoy, I was enormously touched by your efforts in support of my nomination for this award, for your very kind words today as well as the friendship that you have extended to me ever since I returned to Iowa 15 years ago.

To my high school friend from Dubuque and fellow Wahlert and Loras graduate, Attorney General Tom Miller, I extend to you and the entire Centennial Commission my humble appreciation for choosing me for this recognition. I want to acknowledge other distinguished officials here today: Chief Justice Cady, Senate Majority Leader Gronstal, House Minority Leader Mark Smith, legislators and senators, Board of Regents, state elected officials, Ambassador Mary Kramer, Ambassador Portes and two former colleagues from my State Department career, Ambassadors Bob Pearson and Carol Rodley, Major General Orr, distinguished guests, supporters of The World Food Prize and friends who have traveled from out of state.

Unlike all those other Iowa Award recipients here today that I have named, I am not a native Iowan. I was born in the Bronx and bounced around the Midwest before arriving in Dubuque just one week before high school was to start at Loras Academy High School. I went there not knowing a soul and did not even

know my way home when school let out early that first day. I stood there, wondering which way to go. I was befriended by Bob Holz who is here today and with whom I have been best friends ever since. Who would ever have imagined that a kid from Dubuque, who couldn't find his way home from school, would one day be standing here to receive this award.

Eight years later, I drove across the old north end bridge in Dubuque in my two-tone green 1955 Mercury headed towards Madison to take the Foreign Service exam and begin my diplomatic odyssey. I still wasn't quite sure where I was going but my visions were of chandeliered ballrooms in London, Paris or Vienna. But almost before I knew what would happen, I was studying Vietnamese and landing on a dirt road in a remote part of the Mekong Delta to take up the leadership of a 10-person combined military-civilian advisory team just as the Green Revolution was arriving.

If I were to ever write an autobiography, I think the title might be *From the Mississippi to the Mekong*, or *From Iowa to Indochina*, since I ended up living and working in both places on three separate occasions over the next four decades: In SaDec in the Mekong River Delta as we confronted the insurgency during the war; in Chau Doc in the mountains along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border where on a day in June, 1973, I discovered the Khmer Rouge; and then in the mid-90s in Phnom Penh as U.S. ambassador. Back in the U.S., my work focused on refugees at the NSC at the White House and again in Governor Ray's office. Finally, fifteen years ago, once again back home in Iowa to head The World Food Prize, my work focused on combating hunger.

I learned the great lessons of my life while stationed in that remote part of the world. I learned many things about America and Americans and about Iowa that I had never understood while living here.

In the villages of Duc Thanh, as a foot soldier in the Green Revolution, I saw the incredible power that rural roads and new agricultural technology could bring about dramatic change, just as they had

transformed Iowa in the days when John Ruan, Sr. was driving his first truck and Henry Wallace was taking his new hybrid corn to farmers. I saw how new roads and miracle rice could root out and defeat the insurgency that were difficult to overcome with air power and boots on the ground.

It was in that same part of Vietnam that, while involved in combat operations, I learned what it meant to be an American. Whether you were walking through the rice paddies or riding in a helicopter, whenever the radio would carry the message that uniform sierras U.S. troops were under fire or wounded, you immediately went to their assistance, even though you may never have met them, or might not know their names, the color of their skin or their ethnicity or religion. All you needed to know was that they were Americans. You went because you knew they would do the same for you. Such was the bond that united us far, far from home. Congressman Boswell, I am so pleased you are here today and eternally grateful for your efforts that resulted in my being awarded the Army Air Medal, which I proudly wear today.

And I learned that a Foreign Service Officer could have a greater impact while working in remote villages along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border than in those chandeliered ballrooms of Europe. That came when I submitted the first-ever report about the worst genocidal mass-murdering organization of the second half of the 20th century – the Khmer Rouge – or in negotiating entry into North Vietnamese prisons to search for American POW/MIAs.

And back here at home, I learned that there are times when you could affect our country's foreign policy even though you were in Iowa rather than Washington, D.C. This was the case when Governor Bob Ray urged the president of the United States to reopen America's doors to save the Boat People when no country in the world was accepting any more refugees from Indochina.

Wherever I went, whether in Iowa or Indochina, I saw the ability of small, dedicated teams to achieve much more than anyone might ever have expected, whether it was in the Governor's office here in Des

Moines, and I am so pleased that so many members of Governor Ray's staff could be here today, or at the office of the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia where Ambassador Bob Pearson and I served together under the late Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, or at the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh where Ambassador Carol Rodley and I worked together without any marine security guards and still had our post evaluated as the most well-prepared embassy in the Foreign Service, and my wonderful staff at The World Food Prize whose dedication and diligence has built our Foundation into such an incredible tribute to Norman Borlaug and John Ruan, Sr. When I arrived in 1999, I had only one staff member and maybe 50 people came each year from outside Iowa. Last year, more than 1,500 from 65 countries came to The World Food Prize.

But the most important small team of all, through all of these adventures and trials and danger, was the Quinn family who provided the inspiration, steadfastness, motivation and love that sustained me in every assignment and every adventure we undertook. Le Son, Davin, Shandon, and Kelly were always there, sharing the danger, always willing to make the sacrifices and always providing the support so I could – so we could – represent our country.

There have been some truly memorable moments in my career:

- In June 1979, being in that UN hall in Geneva, as the delegates to the UN conference on the Boat People gave America a standing ovation for the announcement that the United States would now accept 168,000 refugees a year, thus saving the Boat People – an initiative that started in Governor Ray's office. Iowa provided global moral leadership to the world that day. Ambassador Bob Pearson was there that day.
- I recall just a few months later being at a place called Sa Kaew on the Thai-Cambodian border with Governor and Mrs. Ray and seeing 30,000 starving Cambodians, dying at a rate of 50-100 a day. Then, two months later on Christmas Day, I picked up the Des Moines Register on my front

porch to read the story that the gifts of food, medicine and live-sustaining support, provided through the Iowa SHARES campaign we had created, had been delivered to these same people. I am so pleased Nicky Schissel is here since she was part of that small team that did so much.

- Making the call from Cambodia to Washington in March 1999 that the last Khmer Rouge had surrendered and that our strategy of using rural roads and new agricultural technology that Ambassador Rodley and I had put in place had destroyed this genocidal terrorist organization.
- The image of unveiling Dr. Borlaug's statue in Statuary Hall on March 25 is still fresh in my mind.

I remember the hugs. I was speaking to a group of very bright political science majors at Grinnell College when one of the students asked me what were the most significant moments in my diplomatic career, expecting me to mention a treaty I worked on with Henry Kissinger or a negotiation in Paris. But after thinking a few moments, I said "the hugs."

- The hug from the father of a ten year old Vietnamese boy after I drove his son, who had been shot in the stomach, through the city of Sa Dec to the hospital in time to save his life.
- The hug of the American Air Force sergeant whom I had pulled from a swollen canal in Vietnam as he was drowning.
- The hug of a Vietnamese refugee as he stood in the Governor's office in the Iowa State Capitol after I had arranged for him to leave the camp in Southeast Asia where he had been stranded and begin a new life here in Iowa.
- The hug from a Cambodian-American official in Phnom Penh after I had driven into the scene of ongoing fighting to rescue. With tears running down his face, he told me that now he knew what it meant to be an American.

- Even though it was not quite a hug, I recall Dr. Borlaug squeezing my hand when I visited with him for the last time a few days before he passed away and telling me how grateful he was for all I had done at The World Food Prize.
- Most of all, I remember my wife and I hugging our children as they lay on the floor in our house in Phnom Penh after it had been hit by a rocket and was now ringed in automatic weapons fire. As we covered them with our bodies, we prayed more ardently than we had ever prayed for anything, that the bullets that came through the windows would kill us and not them. I learned how much I love my family in Indochina.

One final thing I learned on my diplomatic journey is that cultures and countries and people are often defined by the sense of obligation that its citizens feel towards each other and to others far beyond their borders. I am so proud to be from a state whose great heroes – their images and names all on display here in the Iowa Gallery of this building – are those who recognized their obligation to feed people all around the world – people who are hungry and in desperate need of food. Seven of the 22 persons who have previously received the Iowa Award Medal were individuals involved in alleviating human suffering, feeding the hungry and ensuring global food security. I am honored to now be part of that legacy and to have my name joined with that array of Iowans. I am so proud to be a recipient of the Iowa Award Medal. I am so proud to be an American. I am so proud to be an Iowan.